

THE STUDY OF MAN

CIVIL LIBERTIES AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Tolerance and Anti-Communism

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TEN or twenty years ago, no one could have predicted that the defense of civil liberties would become the complicated problem it is today. A generation raised on campaigns for the defense of the civil liberties of socialists, pacifists, anarchists, and an outspoken or queer teacher here or there encountered no perplexities to trouble and confuse its mind about defending dissidents. It could even extend its protection to the odd crackpot who supported the Nazis and the fascists; there were too few of them to make a difference.

But now the matter has become more difficult and complex. There is no question that Communism, few as the actual party members may have been at any time, had a far greater influence on American intellectual and cultural life, and in American government, too, than anything that can be legitimately called Nazism or fascism. And there is no question that the American people in general feel more intensely about Communists than they felt about Nazism and fascism. So, since the threat was greater, and the popular antagonism more intense, and, since, too, we live in a democratic country, the last ten years have seen the creation of a

ARE sociologists, with their current predilection for opinion-polling techniques, in danger of mistaking what people think for what is? With this question in mind, NATHAN GLAZER examines Samuel A. Stouffer's *Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties* (Doubleday, 278 pp., \$4.00) and offers his own appraisal of tolerance in contemporary America, with special reference to the problem of anti-Communism. Mr. Glazer is a frequent contributor to our pages, and is co-author (with David Riesman and Reuel Denney) of *The Lonely Crowd*.

whole system of law, administrative regulations, regulative bodies, and private agencies devoted, at one extreme, to putting Communists in jail, and at the other to making life difficult for people who might have been or might now be Communists.

In the resulting hullabaloo and confusion, many people have grown concerned about the erosion or abrogation of the civil liberties of non-Communists as well as Communists; other people have been concerned about the extent of the Communist threat, and whether the counter-measures constitute a really effective defense against it. At such moments we have learned to expect the great foundations to take a hand in the public debate: to appoint objective and qualified authorities to review the issue, and to come forth with proposals and recommendations. The Ford Foundation's Fund for the Republic, which devotes itself to the defense of civil liberties, has fulfilled this expectation in sponsoring the recently published *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties*, by Samuel A. Stouffer. What, then, has a leading sociologist working with the resources of a great foundation to tell us about the American people and civil liberties today?

To begin with, we should understand that Professor Stouffer's work deals only with one part of the problem. It is a survey of *opinions*, in effect a public opinion poll, conducted by the best qualified agencies and guided by the best authorities, on what the American people think about Communism and civil liberties. From any survey of opinions we find out what people *think*. In this book, we find out what the American people think about allowing advocates of public ownership of industry, opponents of religion, suspected Communists, and

admitted Communists to speak, publish, teach, hold government jobs, and so on. To a much smaller and less adequate extent, we find out how serious they consider the danger posed by domestic Communists to be. We do not find out whether, *in fact*, the civil liberties of advocates of public ownership, atheists, and Communists have been infringed, whether they should be limited, how the present situation in this respect compares with the past, and whether it is likely to deteriorate or improve in the future.

But, obviously, what people think about Communism, and what they think ought to be done about it, is itself one of the most important facts in the situation. If public opinion is indifferent, then government leaders may safely do little or nothing; if it is enlightened, they may take whatever measures they deem wise to meet the Communist threat; if public opinion is violently aroused but ill informed, then legislators and officials may have to take measures which they feel are unwise, or the braver ones may have to undertake the difficult job of educating public opinion. So, despite the necessary limitations of the polling technique, much of value can be uncovered by a survey of what people think.

LET us turn now to the study. Two organizations—Gallup's American Institute of Public Opinion and the National Opinion Research Center—conducted the interviewing, using the same questionnaire, and drawing samples of roughly the same size—2,400 persons in each—so that they could check their results against each other. (In most cases the differences were minor.)

In addition to this national sample of 4,800 cases, a second sample of community leaders was studied by the two organizations. Towns of more than 10,000 but less than 150,000 were selected at random, and fourteen of their leading citizens were interviewed—political leaders, business and civic leaders, labor leaders, and heads of major voluntary organizations; they were asked the same questions that were put to the national sample. Some 1,500 community leaders were interviewed, and it thus became possible to compare people of position and substance in the middle-sized cities of the country with the rest of the people of those cities, and with the country as a whole.

This was the most interesting feature of the design of the study. The general finding that

the community leaders are more tolerant than the ordinary run of people will come as no surprise to readers of public opinion polls, who have long known that the educated take civil liberties more seriously than the rest of the country does. The fact, however, that even commanders of American Legion posts and regents of the DAR are far more liberal than the American people in general, is a surprise. But this would seem to be a reflection less of a responsible concern for civil liberties on the part of the American Legion and the DAR than of the fact that the American populace is so woefully indifferent to the ordinary requirements of democracy.

Let me cite a few findings that support this generalization. "If a person wanted to make a speech in your community favoring government ownership of the railroads and the big industries," one question runs, "should he be allowed to speak, or not?" Fifty-eight per cent of the national cross-section would permit him to speak (three out of ten people in the country would not!), while 81 per cent of the community leaders would. Seventy-six per cent of the American Legion post commanders, and 75 per cent of the DAR regents would permit him to speak—a considerably higher percentage than in the country as a whole. A majority of the people, and almost half the community leaders (47 per cent) would be against allowing the advocate of public ownership to teach in a college or university.

Everyone was harsher on "a person who wanted to make a speech against church and religion." A heavy majority of the national cross-section (60 per cent) would not allow him to speak, and a third of the community leaders took the same position. Seven-tenths of the community leaders would not allow an opponent of churches and religion to teach in a college and university. Relatively small minorities (one-fifth of the national sample, one-tenth of the leaders sample) would not permit a speech to be made by a man "whose loyalty had been questioned before a Congressional committee, but who swore under oath he had never been a Communist." The admitted Communist, naturally, fares worst. A bare majority of the community leaders would permit him to speak, and would not remove his book from the library shelf. It is rather startling to read that 68 per cent of the national sample think he should be fired if he is a clerk in a store—and a bare majority of community leaders

also think so. Indeed, when asked, "Should an admitted Communist be put in jail?" 51 per cent of the national cross-section and 27 per cent of the community leaders say yes. Communists fare better at the hands of even the Department of Justice, it seems, than they would if the majority of the people of this country had their way.

Certainly the people of the United States are not overly concerned about protecting the rights of those with whom they disagree. If it is any consolation, they have held such attitudes for a long time. The "level of tolerance"—if we measure it by what people say—has never been high. "... Even in 1943, after the battle of Stalingrad, two out of five Americans would have prohibited any Communist party member from speaking on the radio. By 1948 this proportion was up to 57 per cent; by 1952 it had risen to 77 per cent; and in ... January 1954 the figure was 81 per cent ... an NORC survey before the war found 25 per cent who would deny socialists the right to publish newspapers; by 1953 [this figure had risen to] 45 per cent."

By contrast with the American people as a whole, the community leaders stand forth as bulwarks and champions of civil liberties.

BEFORE apprehending the extinction of the last remnants of liberty on these shores, however, we should remind ourselves that this is a study of opinions and not realities; that socialists, atheists, and even Communists regularly publish newspapers and make speeches, and that individuals in the first two of these categories teach and work for the government and for colleges and even school boards without major disturbances, despite the "will of the American people"; in short, that liberty is not to be measured, or at least not solely, by the opinions of a random sampling of people the great majority of whom have never thought about or considered the questions with which they are confronted; and that legislatures and courts and constitutions and our customary procedures are surer defenses of liberty than the off-the-cuff feelings of the man on the street. It seems, indeed, that it is almost in an absent-minded or abstracted way that the average American will propose these drastic measures for Communists. Most people just don't seem to be terribly concerned about domestic Communism—or any political issue. When asked, "Do you happen to know the

names of any Senators and Congressmen who have been taking a leading part in these investigations of Communism?" 30 per cent of the national cross-section "could not come up with a single correct name—not even the name of Senator McCarthy!" And this was during the televised Senate investigation of the fight between Senator McCarthy and the army.

And yet we cannot be indifferent to the fact that most people will accept the penalizing of opinion and speech with hardly a qualm; we should like to know more about just why they hold such benighted opinions and what, if anything, can be done about it. Professor Stouffer's work offers some help. To begin with, it helps us to identify those elements in the population which are strongest in their feeling for liberty, and those which are most indifferent, or most actively opposed to it for certain groups. (Rather than deal with many questions on many specific issues, Dr. Stouffer combines fifteen questions to form a "scale of tolerance," and then examines the distribution to tolerance in the population.)

If we arbitrarily fix on a certain score in the scale of tolerance and call those achieving this score the "more tolerant"—31 per cent of the national sample fall into this category—we find that:

47 per cent of those aged 21-29 are "more tolerant"

66 per cent of college graduates are "more tolerant"

48 per cent of the people who live in the West are "more tolerant"

39 per cent of the people who live in metropolitan areas are "more tolerant."

The concentrations of the "less tolerant" are to be found among the old, the poorly educated, Southerners, and small-town dwellers and farmers.*

*One should not be misled by the term "more tolerant." It would perhaps be better to call these people "less intolerant." One can be against allowing a Communist or an opponent of religion to speak publicly, and still be classed among the "more tolerant." The "less tolerant" are those who would favor sanctions against someone who had only been *accused* of being a Communist! (Even Senator McCarthy would undoubtedly bob up at the "tolerant" end of the scale, so generous must one be in defining tolerance in America if one is to get a large enough sample of the "tolerant" to study successfully.)

Of course, all these factors—and some lesser ones in determining tolerance—may be inter-related. The young tend to be better educated than the old, the people who live in big cities tend to be better educated than those in small towns, a higher proportion of Westerners than of Southerners live in big cities, etc. What is it, then, that makes a man more tolerant when two or more of these factors come together, as they often do? One wishes that the author had done more to determine which of these factors was “more important,” but even without his help it seems possible to say that education is by far the most important.

THERE are two indications of its importance which we can glean from the data. For one thing, if you take all those between the ages of twenty-one and sixty who are high school graduates or of lesser education—and this forms a huge block of the population—you find that age seems to have no effect on tolerance while quantity of education is decisive. Thus, in this group, roughly 20 per cent of those with only grade school education, roughly 30 per cent of those with some high school education, and close to 45 per cent of the high school graduates, are “more tolerant” — regardless of the ages in these educational categories. Our second indication is provided by the South, which is far less tolerant as a whole than the other regions of the country; thus only 16 per cent of the South is rated “more tolerant” as against 32 per cent of the Midwest, 39 per cent of the East, and 48 per cent of the West. But these very large differences are reduced to much smaller ones if one compares *educated* Southerners with educated people from other regions. Of college graduates in metropolitan areas, 62 per cent of Southerners are among the “more tolerant,” compared (for the same category) with 64 per cent of the Middle West, 78 per cent of the East, and 73 per cent of the West. Pretty much the same story is told when we compare those with “some college.” It is only when we get to those with a high school education or less that we find the great gap between the South and the rest of the country.

Education is perhaps most closely related to what is generally called “socio-economic status” or class, and which, in most public opinion studies, appears in the form of occupation. It would be interesting, in particular, to know where workers stand on this question of tolerance, and it would be interesting, too,

to know where businessmen and professional people fall. Unfortunately, there is surprisingly little data reported directly on this point — though we do learn in passing that men in the professions and semi-professions include the same proportion of the “tolerant” as college graduates. One would guess that workers are roughly as intolerant as those with high school educations or less. (It is interesting, though not revealing for this point, that labor union leaders are no more tolerant than presidents of Chambers of Commerce.)

BUT once having mapped out the areas of tolerance and intolerance—and I think the map as presented by Dr. Stouffer is roughly correct—we come to the really difficult questions that must precede any sort of deeper understanding. What does it mean to say that the less educated, the people in rural areas, the Southerners, and the old people are less tolerant? If we were to educate the uneducated, and encourage migration from rural areas to cities, and from the South to the North, does it mean that the level of tolerance in this country would be raised and our problems solved? At times Dr. Stouffer writes almost as if this were so. But clearly there are two problems. One can legitimately be called the problem of intolerance—the problem of the meanness and narrowness that are the natural consequences, at least in America, of isolation, poverty, “lack of advantages,” and old age. The intolerant are as likely to keep a socialist from opening his mouth as to throw a Communist into jail. Communism as a special and unique problem does not affect this kind of person—his intolerance predates it and will outlive it. This is in effect a *social* problem. The Communists and their actions are occasions for the expression of this intolerance rather than its true cause. Dr. Stouffer is right in linking this kind of intolerance to Communism with intolerance of unorthodoxy in the fields of economics and religion (which is what his scale of intolerance does). About this aspect of the problem, Dr. Stouffer tells a fairly complete story.

But then there is the matter of Communism as a *political* problem and how to deal with it, which is also intimately related to the problem and state of civil liberties in this country. This political problem is a much more fluid and changeable matter than the social problem of intolerance, more dependent on changes in

international affairs and domestic American politics than on a change in the educational level or the encouragement of internal migration at home.

When one comes to the political aspects of the problem of Communism and civil liberties, Professor Stouffer is much less adequate. Indeed, it is impossible in his book to find any way of distinguishing the two positions on Communism and civil liberties that are politically relevant today—the position of those who feel that no measures at all should be taken against native Communists, and the position of those who feel that Smith Acts and McCarran Acts are important and necessary defenses against Communism.

The reason it is impossible to distinguish between these two positions is that Professor Stouffer does not study the problem of Communism directly, but treats it as part of the larger problem of "conformism." Thus, in his scale of tolerance, we cannot distinguish those who are tolerant of Communists from those who are intolerant, but only those who are tolerant of Communists *and* of atheists, socialists, and so on, from those who are not. And since the scale mixes up all these forms of tolerance, the reader—or at least a reader like myself, who does not conceive of the problem of Communism as only a sub-variant of the problem of toleration of non-conformism—is not helped in his effort to understand the different attitudes toward Communism in this country.

The great majority of Americans taking a harsh view of Communism will of course be the intolerant—the more poorly educated, those from more backward areas, and so on. They will be the ones who also disapprove of socialists and atheists. Yet there is also a minority of people who feel it necessary to take strong measures against Communists and who are not undereducated and underprivileged. In a political context, it is their views that matter—as well, of course, as the views of that other large group of the educated and privileged who would not limit the liberties and privileges of Communists. It is the views of the educated that matter because they write the newspapers, fill the legislatures, and even become heads of American Legion posts and regents of the DAR. Of course, the views of the intolerant mass of people matter too—it is because of their existence that the relatively small minority of the educated which is very strongly anti-Communist can gain such wide popular support.

THESE two very different attitudes to Communism are never distinguished in Dr. Stouffer's study. The majority rules in sociology as in voting; and if the majority of those who would not let a Communist teach or make a public speech are poorly educated, come from backward areas, are old, and won't stand for socialism and Communism in the schools and the public market place—why, then, that characterizes that position. Yet the person who would not let a Communist teach in a public school because he would not let anyone with whom he strongly disagreed teach—socialist, atheist, or what have you—is very different from the person who would not let a Communist teach because he thinks indoctrination has no place in education.

These are admittedly subtle distinctions for a public opinion poll (not that they could not be made if one were aware of their importance). But I think they are crucial for an understanding of the whole problem of Communism, conformism, and civil liberties which Dr. Stouffer has taken up. If one does not make these distinctions one can easily, by a process of damnation by association, dismiss important political positions which deserve to be discussed on their own merits and not on the basis of who holds them. One cannot dispose of the question of what measures are necessary to deal with Communism by *ad hominem* arguments, by demonstrating that the poor and ignorant, for the most part, want to get tough with Communists and the enlightened, for the most part, don't.

Yet this, it seems to me, is just what tends to happen in Dr. Stouffer's book. In sum, there is a failure to distinguish between what we may call the *intolerant*—those who will say "Kill the Communists" as easily as they say "Kill the umpire"—and the *concerned*—those who are sincerely worried about Communism and think strong measures are necessary to deal with it.

This failure emerges most strikingly when Dr. Stouffer considers just what is the relationship between concern with Communism and tolerance. As the reader will recall, a scale of tolerance was derived by Dr. Stouffer from a series of questions about advocates of government ownership of industry, opponents of religion, and accused and actual Communists. A new factor is now introduced—that of "perception of the internal Communist threat." This is measured by a scale which includes such

questions as, "Do you think there are any Communists teaching in American public schools (or working in American defense plants, etc.)?" followed by the question, "How much danger is there that these Communists can hurt the country. . . ."* The author considers the relationship between the perception of the internal Communist threat and tolerance of great importance, on the ground that, if there is a positive relationship, we might expect an increase in tolerance if the internal Communist threat is perceived as falling; while a negative relationship—that is, one in which intolerance goes hand in hand with a perception that the internal Communist threat is unimportant—would suggest the need for "a long-sustained program of public education" to increase tolerance. It turns out that there is a positive relationship. And on this basis, the author concludes, "The relationship is high enough and consistent enough to suggest that if the internal Communist threat is now exaggerated, and if the American people were told this and believed it, tolerance of non-conformists would increase."

*The scale for determining "perception of the Communist danger" seems to me to be a very peculiar instrument. It consists of questions of the type: Do you think there are any Communists in public grade schools . . . government . . . the country in general . . . colleges and universities . . . defense plants? (in that order) followed by the question: How great a danger do you think they are? The order is important, for, according to the theory of scales, if a person accepts the idea that Communists are a danger in the public schools, he will accept the idea that they are a danger in all other areas, too. This will make him "most perceptive." The next category would be those who reject the idea that Communists are a danger in the public schools but think they are a danger everywhere else. And so on right down to the "least perceptive" who do not think that Communists are a danger even in defense plants. While I am the first to bow before the mysteries of science, I cannot see the reason for this order, and refuse to believe that the scale—whatever else it is measuring—is measuring something that might legitimately be called "perception of the internal Communist threat." I think Dr. Stouffer, in view of the importance he gives to the scale, should have explained how it happens that a person who believes Communists are a danger in the public schools is more "perceptive of the Communist threat" than one who just believes Communists are a danger "in the country in general." Dr. Stouffer rests on the mathematical procedure by which his scale was set up; he should have gone further and determined just what this scale was measuring.

The conclusion of this demonstration is that any lover of tolerance should logically desire the perception of the Communist danger to be low—for low perception, Dr. Stouffer's figures show us, is related to high tolerance. But what has been forgotten is that as a matter of fact there are people who perceive the Communist threat and yet are tolerant, and while they do not form a majority of either category (that is, of the perceptive or the tolerant), we may nevertheless decide that the best policy is to try to increase their number. And this can be done not only by teaching tolerance to those who perceive the Communist threat, but teaching the tolerant about Communism.

WE are all familiar with the kind of thinking that Dr. Stouffer has, I think, inadvertently fallen into: the position that says, if we want people to be more tolerant of Negroes, it is possibly best that they should not believe there are a disproportionately large number of Negro criminals and paupers—even though there are.

The error in this kind of thinking, as Paul Kecskemeti argued brilliantly in *COMMENTARY* in his critique of *The Authoritarian Personality* ("Prejudice in the Catastrophic Perspective," March 1951), is the assumption that everything associated with a good is itself a good. Dr. Kecskemeti pointed out that if anti-Semitism is associated with hostility to Soviet Russia, and lack of anti-Semitism with friendliness to Soviet Russia, it does not follow that we have to encourage friendliness toward the Soviet Union to encourage friendship for the Jews. These relations are, if not fortuitous, then certainly historical, products of given moments, given combinations of events. Such relations may change. It then becomes incumbent on us to decide, from the point of view of our own values and our own conception of the world, what is good and what is true, and try to achieve that directly, rather than slavishly accept whatever cluster of attitudes fall together at any given moment as organically and necessarily related.

In the present situation, it would follow that if we believe it is true that native Communists exist and have played a considerable role in American government, society, and culture, and still play some role—and this is what I believe—then we need not resign ourselves to having these truths forgotten or actively denied, simply because such forgetting

or denial has been shown to have some sort of statistical connection (in the present era) with tolerance.

In any case, it would seem crucial to determine whether internal Communism represents a threat or not: if it does not, there is no conflict between the values of truth and tolerance. If it does, then there is a conflict, for Dr. Stouffer seems to take it for granted that the sensible position of being aware of the threat and yet upholding tolerance cannot be expected to grow. But on this crucial *if*, Dr. Stouffer does not commit himself. Dr. Stouffer, I think, would like to take the position that the threat is exaggerated; but hampered by a crippling notion of scientific objectivity, he never quite decides to take the leap. He seems to me to have fallen victim to that canon of contemporary social scientific research which defines the universe of any study by the methods used in that study. Because there is no way of deciding the extent of the Communist threat with the methods of public opinion research, Dr. Stouffer finds it impossible to take a stand on this question. And yet if social science is to make a contribution to a problem it must try to encompass it in all its reality—and not limit itself to that part of it which falls within the purview of its favorite methods.

As a matter of fact, of course, there are many people, even in Dr. Stouffer's sample, who are fully aware of the true dimensions of the Communist problem in this country, without being intolerant (just as there are others who rate low in perception of the internal Communist threat and are intolerant). It is just these people who bulk large in the leadership groups in this country. But Dr. Stouffer is so interested in pursuing the majority, that large group which has a high perception of the Communist danger and is intolerant, or has a low perception and is tolerant, that he ignores these rather crucial minority groups. We find out little about them—who they are, where they live, and how their numbers might be increased. Dr. Stouffer works with one major value—tolerance. Everything else is secondary. And what is associated (statistically speaking) with tolerance should flourish like the green bay tree, and what is associated with intolerance should wither away and die, if we are to have a good society. Recall his conclusion: "If the internal Communist threat is now exaggerated, and if the American people were

told this and believed it, tolerance of non-conformists would increase" [my italics].

To return, then, to our distinction between the intolerant and the concerned—between those who want to throw the Communists into jail just as they want to throw anyone they disagree with into jail, and those who are aware of the existence of a Communist problem and differ as to what measures are necessary to deal with it.

Dr. Stouffer, it seems to me, has told us the story about the first group, which must indeed always concern us, and in doing so he has made a contribution to sociology. The second group, however, is for the most part lost to sight in his sample, and its crucial characteristics cannot be easily discerned. It is this group which is most important politically. Their tolerance (or intolerance) is different from that of the less educated majority; their perception (or want of perception) of the internal Communist threat is also different. It is possible to be tolerant out of ignorance and a complete indifference to the political life of the nation. It is also possible to be tolerant out of a commitment to democracy. It is possible to be intolerant out of a sadistic and brutal inquisitiveness about other people. It is also possible to be "intolerant," at least to some extent, out of a love of one's country and a rational and strong belief that it is so seriously threatened that certain measures, unnecessary in other times and in the face of other enemies, may be necessary.

Without an awareness of these distinctions—which play no role in Dr. Stouffer's study—one can make no contribution to the solution of the political problems of Communism and civil liberties; and I think he has made none.

But I think we should be grateful for what he has done. The facts he has reported, on the general distribution of tolerance in this country, and the general calmness (or indifference) about Communism are interesting and, I think, reflect the actual situation in the country. Dr. Stouffer concludes soberly, and I believe correctly, that there is "no evidence that the country as a whole is suffering from quivering fear or from an anxiety neurosis about the internal Communist threat. If there is a sickness, the clinical symptoms are more like that of dietary deficiency."

He refers, of course, to the incredible evidence, quoted a while back, of the willingness of the mass of the American people to suppress

the speech and rights of anyone with whom they disagree. But even here, he sees hopeful signs in the remarkable impact of education on these attitudes. Since with the passing years, larger and larger proportions of Americans reach higher and higher levels of education, they should take more and more tolerant attitudes. (The same patterns may be seen at work in connection with anti-Semitism. Education may not basically affect people, but it teaches them what is right, and, for things about which they do not feel passionately, like Jews and maybe civil liberties, they will bow to the right.) Dr. Stouffer also points out that the greater tolerance of the big-city dwellers, the Westerners, and the better educated is very likely the product of the fact that they come in touch with all kinds of people and their

local prejudices wear off. And since the tendency seems to be in the direction of even more of this internal migration, one might expect this factor, too, to lead to greater tolerance.

These conclusions seem valid to me, but they apply to the mass of the intolerant—not to the minority of the concerned whose views will be shaped by political events and decisions, not by long-term social developments. Yet it is a virtue of this kind of work that, once the questionnaires are distributed and the results are in, they can be turned to by other people seeking solutions to problems not considered by those who conducted the original study. It may be hoped that this study will yield more answers to the questions of future investigators than those presently found in it.